With the support of

We build welcoming, supportive, inclusive communities.

COMMUNITY MATCHING

Communities and Refugees together for integration

2023 Results

Bari / Turin / Rome

18 October
Launch of the project in Bari and Turin

20 November
Launch of the first match

2022

Key milestones of Phase I (Bari / Milan and Palermo)

1 January
Implementation of Milan and Palermo

1 February
Implementation of the Toolkit

15 March
Launch of the Registration of Palermo

12 April
Launch of the programme and website www.communitymatching.it

1 May
Project launch in Naples

1 June
Extension of the programme to Ukrainian refugees also in the city of Palermo

30 June
First 100 matches

20 June
Project presented for Merit Refugee Day

September
Meetings with Caritas Catalana, UNHCR Barcelona for Milan, the Unity Box and Sant Antoni Abat for Palermo

2021

Bergamo - Bologna - Padua
Start of the project

23 February
Start of research research for Social Group Discussion in Padua

1 March
Launch of the project in Bergamo

16 June
Presentation of the AMF Guide: Let Thinking Communities Move Forward, a collection of refugees includes Community Matching among the territorial operation that can be funded

20 June
Start in Rome, Parma, Turin, Milan, Naples, Bari and Palermo in continue. World Refugee Day

August
Community Matching is included among the recommendations of the Global Compact on Refugees

29 September
Presentation of the implementation report at the Municipality of Padua

October
Kick-off meeting with the Advocacy Tool

The project continues to 31 Dec and the network grows

The Programme

THE VISION

Social relations are crucial to foster effective and sustainable integration pathways. They facilitate access to housing, work, language learning and development of social networks. The programme also helps break down barriers and stereotypes, and assists refugees in regaining a sense of self-determination, dignity, and trust in both institutions and civil society and aids. This is the idea behind Community Matching, a programme of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) together with Refugees Welcome Italy and Caritas Immigrazione Asylo. Community Matching also shares its roots in the support of the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai through B-1000 Funds.

The First annual report shows the results of the programme.

THE OBJECTIVES

Community Matching promotes matches between volunteers and refugees to foster their full autonomy and integration into the social, economic, and cultural life of local communities. The programme contributes to building inclusive and welcoming territorial integration services. Engaging local communities and extending social networks to refugees creates a favourable environment for integration and helps promote social cohesion, reducing racism and xenophobia.

The Community Matching programme also aims to produce evidence and establish a model to influence public opinion and asylum policies by pulling the capacities of refugees and host communities at the centre.

How does it work?

1. **REGISTRATION**
Volunteers and refugees interested can register by filling in the form at www.buddycontrol.it. They are then asked to sign a consent form to disclose their personal data.

2. **TRAINING & ORIENTATION**
After the first contact, applicants have access to a simple training to learn more about the project.

3. **MATCHES**
Based on the program aseanses, together with the people involved (volunteer or refugee), which match can best meet their expectations and needs. The first meeting between the two people will be facilitated by the matchmaker. A match has a minimum duration of 6 months and will always be accompanied by qualified personnel.

4. **MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT**
The project team supports the match and assesses the progress towards autonomy and integration of the refugees involved through specific tools and indicators.

Evidence collected over the years indicates that the development of personal and social relationships between refugees and host communities is the most effective way to the integration prospects of refugees, enhance their ability to contribute to society and encourages the mobilisation of new communities.

Methodology

In line with the programme objectives, Community Matching has developed a comprehensive methodology to implement protection and integration measures focused on structured engagement of the local community and refugees in a mutual exchange. The simple and rigorous methodology is summarised in the Community Matching Toolkit, finalised in 2022.

The programme decides special attention to **research** and **assessment of the impact** of intercultural relations on both refugees and the local community.

On the refugee side, based on the experience of the programme, a complex methodology has been developed to detect significant changes in the perceived quality of life, in the match and the extent of the project, six months later. The central tool used is the Refugee Social Technical Integration Plan (Piano Inclusione di Integrazione Territoriale, PIIT).

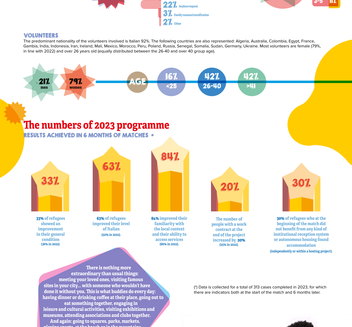
In 2023 the research expanded to include the host community. Matching on local communities, exploring the extent to which the programme has contributed to intercultural communities, social change and combating discrimination and racism.

$35 per volunteer
-22% Medium-term effect
$67 per refugee
+47% Medium-term effect
$12 per host community member
+8% Medium-term effect

The profiles

REFUGEES INVOICED

Refugees belong to **67 different nationalities** (+6 compared to 2022), the main one being Ukrainian: most (54%) are men (49% in 2022) and **43% have some form of international protection** (60% in 2022). **55% of the cases are out** of the institutional **reception system** at the time of the start of the match (only 32% in SAI reception projects, in line with 2022, 33%). Most refugees have been in Italy for 2 years or less (70%).



VOLUNTEERS

The predominant nationality of the volunteers involved is Italian 52%. The following countries are also represented: Algeria, Australia, Colombia, Egypt, France, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Germany, Ukraine. Most volunteers are female (79%, in line with 2022) and over 26 years old (equally distributed between the 26-40 and over 40 group age).

The numbers of 2023 programme

RESULTS ACHIEVED IN 6 MONTHS OF MATCHES

33% of refugees showed an improvement in their overall condition (10% in 2022).

63% of refugees improved their level of Italian (30% in 2022).

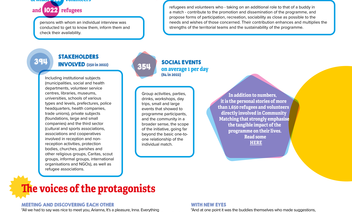
84% improved their familiarity with the local context and their ability to access services (80% in 2022).

There is nothing more extraordinary than being welcomed into your friend's home, being shown the places in your city, with someone who wouldn't have done it without you. This is what Buddies do every day: having dinner or drinking coffee at their place, going out to eat something together, engaging in leisure and cultural activities, visiting exhibitions and museums, or just spending time together. Buddies find equity going to sporting events, watching or playing sports, at the beach or in the mountain. And they also play small changes become great achievements and rewards.

The number of people with a job increased at the end of the project increased by **20%** (10% in 2022).

30% of refugees who at the beginning of the match did not benefit from any kind of institutional reception system or autonomous housing found accommodation (independently or within a housing project).

(?) Data is collected for a total of 39 cases completed in 2023, for which there are indicators both at the start of the match and 6 months later.



WHY COMMUNITY MATCHING?

Among the objectives indicated by the refugees involved when the match was started, the following prevails: **improve their Italian language skills (63%), improve their overall well-being (33%)**, and the establishment of solidarity ties (20%), compare in **discovering** the city and opportunities on the territory (12%) and support in their **job** search (8%), followed, with lower percentages, by participation in cultural activities (4%), **improve their knowledge of the local context** in **buddies** (5%), **training** support (8%), **language tandem** (5%), **housing search** support (8%), **legal** and bureaucratic support (8%).

Building communities

Following the Community Matching methodology, the match does not remain isolated in the one-to-one relationship but is part of the broader community support network. In fact, the relationship between the two people involved in the match is enriched by fostering opportunities for encounters and exchanges between Italian citizens and refugees, the programme contributes to building inclusive and welcoming societies.

Community Matching has proven to be a powerful means of introducing new places to buddies, while also of showing these same places to be experienced and frequented by new people. It contributes changing the fabric and urban landscape of the places where the programme is present.

IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

The impact on local and refugee communities was studied through qualitative-quantitative research involving **310 buddies** in all programme cities, through questionnaires, focus group discussions and paired interviews. *Read an extract from the publication to be released in October 2024.*

+8,900 People to whom the programme was communicated through the voice of its participants (an average of 8 people per buddy)

+9% of refugees met compared to before the match (in Buddycontrol)

+281 of Italian people met by refugee buddies.

2,003 PEOPLE WHO BECAME AWARE OF AND INTERESTED IN THE PROGRAMME (1 call in 2022)

of **1,000** volunteers and **1023** refugees

persons with whom an individual interview was conducted to get to know them, inform them and check their availability

209 COMMUNITY FACILITATORS ACTIVATED (new for 2023)

refugees and volunteers who - taking on an additional role to that of a buddy in a match - contribute to the promotion and dissemination of the programme, organise events and initiatives, accompany other people in the match, meet the needs and wishes of those concerned. Their contribution enhances and multiplies the strengths of the territorial teams and the sustainability of the programme.

34% STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED (Call in 2022)

including institutional subjects (municipalities, social and health services, reception centres, libraries, museums, universities, schools of various levels, sports clubs, associations headquarters, health centres, public trade unions), private subjects (foundations, single and small companies) and the third sector (cooperatives, associations and associations and consortiums involved in reception and non-reception projects, religious bodies, churches, parishes and other religious groups, Caritas, scout groups, cultural and recreational organisations and NGOs), as well as refugee associations.

354 SOCIAL EVENTS on average 1 per day (Na in 2022)

Group activities, parties, drinks, workshops, day trips, sports, etc. Events that stimulate a programme participants, and the community in a broader sense, the scope of the programme goes beyond the basic one-to-one relationship of the individual match.

In addition to numbers, it is the personal stories of more than 1,000 refugees and volunteers directly involved in Community Matching that strongly emphasise the tangible impact of the programme on their lives. Read some of them HERE

The voices of the protagonists

MEETING AND DISCOVERING EACH OTHER

"All we had to say was nice to meet you. Arianna. It's a pleasure, Irina. Everything else was a mystery. We had no idea what we would do, what we would talk about. Everything about Ukraine? Can we talk about the family? It is very natural ways, we made every concern disappear in a second. She described herself with I am this, this, this. I know what I want, these are my daughters, this is my story. And she did all this with such a naturalness that was truly amazing for me." (Arianna, volunteer buddy, Naples)

"People assume that this could be a dramatic, heavy experience. But for me there's also that point where you get to know each other, have fun, expand boundaries." (Maria, volunteer buddy, Rome)

MUTUALITY AND RELATIONSHIP, BEYOND MATERIAL HELP

"The programme was useful for me, it changed many things, before I was very shy, I had problems where friend, I had problems with my documents, everything. But sometimes we don't need someone to give us financial help... It's more important to find someone who stays with you and says, 'See you Ok?' Yes, I'm fine. Then let me show you this, this and this. You just need some people like that. That is why I love her so much." (Precious, refugee buddy, Milan)

"The programme was useful for me, it changed many things, before I was very shy, I had problems and when I met Tullio I changed my mind, before I was afraid to get in touch with Italians because I felt that they were not open to me, I felt that they were closed to me. Before I meeting this was not the case. I feel more ready to get to know other Italian people." (Mousse, refugee buddy, Turin)

WITH NEW EYES

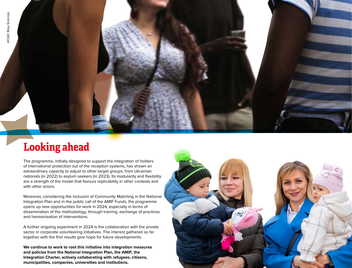
"And at one point it was the buddies themselves who made suggestions, saying, 'Why don't we do this?' We went to the sea, we went to the mountains, we went to the Big Apple tea room and it was she who invited us to do this kind of activity, therefore we, being here, got to know something we didn't know. It also very nice that this not only us, Italians who are active, but we are all together and we same way." (Francesca, volunteer buddy, Naples)

"I went to the christening ceremony of these two little twins, her friend's children, she invited me. It was beautiful because it was an experience I had never lived before, I felt very welcomed, I felt very at home, I felt very at home because I found myself in this place and the relationships were exactly the opposite of how they normally are in society. All black people and I was the only white person, I felt welcomed, I felt looking at me. But it was beautiful because I shared with her part of the culture. It was a beautiful, intense experience." (Sofia, volunteer buddy, Turin)

KNOW, CHANGE, ACT

"I learned a lot, I learned many things about Italy and Europe. Also in terms of people, that there are so many different people. My buddy talks about it a lot with me. We talked a lot about it together, for example about the fact that there are people who, for example, have a different sexual orientation. We did not know so many stories about these people. I thought maybe... they're crazy." (Renan, refugee buddy, Padua)

"The programme has created that bridge between macro-history with a capital I-s, so, what one can generally learn by informing oneself in a rather disinterested way through media, and instead, listening to a person telling you about how war has impacted on his or her personal, very personal life, in his or her family and community, and then, being able to connect the history with a name, with a single person, who is a unique universe and world." (Irene, volunteer buddy, Naples)



Looking ahead

The programme, initially designed to support the integration of holders of international protection out of the reception systems, has shown an extraordinary capacity to adjust to other target groups, from Ukrainian refugees to people in vulnerable situations. This has shown its flexibility as a strength of the model that favours replicability in other contexts and with other actors.

Moreover, considering the inclusion of Community Matching in the National Integration Plan and in the public call of the AMF Funds, the programme is expected to consolidate and grow in the coming years, with a focus on the dissemination of the methodology, through training, exchange of practices and harmonisation of interventions.

A further ongoing experiment in 2024 is the collaboration with the private sector in corporate volunteering initiatives. The interest gathered so far together with the first results give hope for future developments.

We continue to work to root this initiative into integration measures and policies from the National Integration Plan, the AMIF, the Integration Charter, actively collaborating with refugees, citizens, municipalities, companies, universities and institutions.

In this construction of welcoming, inclusive and supportive societies, we all have responsibility and a role to play.

For more information including contributions, go to the website: www.buddycontrol.it

CONTACTS

We thank all the refugees and volunteers who choose to participate in the programme every day, building meaningful relationships and more welcoming and inclusive communities.

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